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A  
DISSWASIVE  
FROM  
GAMING.

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*Late Minister of Poplar.* R

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Corrected and Amended:

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DISSEMINATING

FROM

AMERICAN



THE THIRD EDITION

Containing the History and Antiquities of the

AMERICAN

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# A DISSWASIVE from G A M I N G.

**A**Lthough some sort of diversion and relaxation of mind may seem to be necessary for us in our present state of frailty; (for we are not of the Nature of Angels, who are above these corporal entertainments) yet it is most certain, that no person in the short space of this probational life can have much time to spare for diversion; considering that he has the great concern of eternal life to secure, and that this cannot be done but by the conquest of many sensual appetites, many worldly vanities, and many infernal enemies. And when such a person finds it necessary to divert himself, he ought above all things to look well, that no snares of the enemy lie hid under the diversion that he allows himself; because at this time his mind will be less ready to withstand the attack of an enemy, being, as it were, in the condition of a soldier, that has laid by his armour of a while, the more freely to recreate and disport himself.

We may lawfully, no doubt, indulge ourselves in some amusements, in order to refresh our bodies or our minds; and whilst this is the true reason and end of Game and Diversion, we are hence instructed in two points concerning it: First, That if there be any thing called Game, which is neither a recreation to our  
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body nor mind, it is an unlawful thing, and must be shunned by all wise and sober persons, as a canker and consumer of time, which is the most valuable of all earthly things: And, Secondly, That all such spots and games, as are manifest temptations to sin, and do many times expose men to ruin, are to be renounced with disdain, in christian prudence, and in point of conscience; it being a manifest christian duty to shun all foreseen temptations and occasions of sin, where no necessity constrains us to it, and where the good proposed by it cannot in any measure counterpoise the evil which is to be feared.

When we call a man a *Gamester*, or say he is addicted to gaming, we entertain no favourable opinion of him; but suppose either that he exercises himself in some unlawful diversion; or, if the game be lawful in itself, he is faulty in the excessive use of it, or in the motives which induce him thus to employ himself: Let us inquire then, whether a prudent and sincere Christian may warrantably allow himself in the use of those games, without a diminution to that character?

Now here, in our first thoughts of the matter, we may be assured that some exercises of these games are unquestionably evil, though we should suppose the games themselves to be indifferent and innocent. As if any one plays unseasonably, or on the Lord's day, or on days of public humiliation, or in the proper seasons of prayer, or even so as to prejudice our necessary worldly business; or if any one plays at these

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games merely to get another's money; or if he plays till he wrangles and affronts his company; or if he plays too long, so that he exceeds the reason and intention of diversion. These things are manifestly evil; and whosoever takes not due care to secure himself against this fourfold snare, we may without scruple, term his habit of gaming a base and pernicious Vice. For it is in truth the mother of many vices; as of idleness, vanity, and levity of Spirit; yea, it nurses at the same time the two opposite vices of covetousness and profuseness.

And here, in truth, it is even amazing to consider, in what different, and almost contradictory circumstances, we shall behold the eager gamester; for he is at the same time both busy and idle; in toil, and yet in play; diverted, and yet tormented; and, perhaps, also cheating, and cheated. He is in the same hour both surfeited with affluence, and pinched with penury; and he is all the while excruciated betwixt hope and fear, which is a mere rack to the mind, instead of a diversion.

I have a few things therefore to offer to considerate minds with reference to this matter, and I pray God assist every one that peruses this paper with his grace, that he may apply it to his benefit in both worlds; for, I suppose, none are ignorant, that many persons have, by the extreme vanity of ungoverned gaming, both ruined their estates in this world, and their souls in the other. Be it therefore duly considered, that,

1. Gaming will be very likely to devour much time wherever it is allowed, which is a



very important consideration. For nothing can be to our advantage or comfort, that vainly consumes many of those precious moments, which serve to all our purposes under the sun. For when Time fails, nothing can be done.

I would therefore ask such as at any time are about to set themselves to gaming, what time they propose to spend in it? And to this some will answer, perhaps, that they design to pass away an hour or two; and others, that they intend to spend a winter's evening at it. But here, alas! very few are true to their time assigned. For even they who spend the longest evening in gaming, do too often intrench upon the next morning too. But if we suppose them to be punctual to their least allotment of time, and that they do break off when they have played an hour or two, the reckoning will swell high in time. For if an hour or two be given up to gaming this day, and as much to morrow, or on many other days; alas! how great a share of the active part of our poor threescore years and ten will be spent, yea, squandered away, in idle play, and in impertinent amusements, or, perhaps, in quarrels and random discourse, in coveting and striving for that which is another's, and in many other offences against God.

O Christians! how do you think to pass such reckonings as these with the great and holy God at last? Can you think that he will allow such accounts of your stewardship? Do you not consider, that one single minute of that time which you now so prodigally waste, cannot be purchased with the whole world, were you master of it,  
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when you come to your last important moment! Will you not then cry out with that serious young Prince of ours in the last age, 'Oh, that I had now the hours that I have spent at tennis!' A play, for which more may be said, as being a wholesome bodily exercise, than for the sedentary and insignificant games of carding and dicing. And this leads us to a second consideration.

II. The games of cards and dice, in particular, administer no considerable exercise to the body, and they do exceedingly amuse and entangle the mind; so that they are falsely called by the name of diversions. We are told in History, that they were invented at the siege of some cities in *Asia*, as a contrivance to deceive the hunger of the besieged in those times, when towns were rather won by starving their garrisons by a long blockade, than by the speedier modern way of grinding them to powder by the means of heavy mortars and artillery; which shews the power of these games upon the minds of men, in that they were able to divert the sharpest and most impatient of all human appetites, those of hunger and thirst. Surely such a captivating diversion must needs be unsafe and unadvisable to Christians to employ much time in, whose minds ought always to be girt, and in a fit posture to do service to their Master, and to oppose the onsets and attacks of spiritual enemies, who are never far from us, but do usually invest us with formidable legions.

III. There is usually some apparent ill consequence of gaming, before such as set to it give it over. It too often sacrifices good company,

pany, good humour, and a good conscience together: Some broil or other usually arises, or some indecent levity and jesting, or some excess in point of time, or otherwise; which will make a serious mind wish that it had not been admitted.

IV. We find nothing like these vanities in the lives of the holy Patriarchs and Prophets, nor in the life of our perfect pattern, the Lord Jesus Christ, whose *sheep bear his voice, and follow his steps*; and therefore we find no such trifling way of mis-spending time allowed by the holy Apostles and primitive Christians: But, on the contrary, the consuming much of our time on these, or such like things, hath been condemned by learned and pious men of all ages. The canons of the church, and the laws of the land, express their dislike against gaming; and all such Public Houses as allow it are required to be suppressed, as nuisances in the community.

V. These games are called by the name of Pastime; but do we need any artifice to hasten the flight of our speedy and irretrievable moments, which pass away of themselves swifter than our very thoughts, and will soon cast us into the bliss or torment of an unchangeable eternity?

Methinks these considerations should pall any thoughts of gaming, in all that would act with advice in the conduct of their lives. And as for such as act otherwise, they fall under a deplorable character, and all advice and counsel to them will be utterly lost. For instead of attending to the reason of these things, they

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*A Disswasive from GAMING.* 9

will be apt to cry out, tho' indeed most absurdly, and say, what an intolerable preciseness is this? What, not so much as allow us a game at Christmas? That festival will not look like itself without it.

But I pray you, Sirs, consider, that the vacancy from worldly business at this solemn time was originally and principally intended to give us leisure to worship God and to meditate on his goodness, in sending his son for the redemption of mankind; and that it was by no means designed to be wholly spent in games and diversions.

We have more noble entertainment offered us always, particularly at the festival of our blessed Saviour's nativity before-mentioned. With what divine elevation of soul may we then, or at any time, contemplate or discourse of the marvellous compassion, condescension, and love of God, *who was manifested in the flesh!* And what infinite advantages are hereby opened to mankind; since by this the malice of the devil against men is effectually countermined, and they are now made capable of being translated *from the power of darkness to the kingdom of God's dear son*: yea, the sons of men may now become the adopted children of God, and attain a meetness for, and a title to, his everlasting kingdom. Who can but praise the infinitely *wise, holy, and merciful God*, who hath by this astonishing expedient brought in even his righteousness to act in the pardon of a penitent sinner, believing in Jesus: so that he can now be absolutely just, and yet a  
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justifier of them that believe. The thankful remembrance of these things will be matter of a noble, yea, of a heavenly joy; for we may be sure, the holy angels will join with us, while we sing, *Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will towards men.*

We see then, a Christian needs not go a begging for pleasure at the devil's doors. He has a more delicious feast of his own upon the hidden manna, even in that *peace of God which passeth all understanding*; and in that joy of the Holy Ghost which raises *a joy unspeakable and full of glory*. And these divine pleasures are almost as much better than the envy, malice, and passion, which the devil many times blows up in gamesters, as heaven is than hell. For as the holy Spirit is the author of the divine peace and joy of holy souls, so we may well suspect, both from the extravagant passions and fierce emotions of gamesters in the heat of their play, and from their want of power to give it over, that they are very much actuated by evil spirits, who will, without doubt, be very forward to assist the students in their books, and the lovers of their devices.

O! what have they to answer for before the great and holy God; who make a trade of cheating and impoverishing of men by the pernicious artifices of gaming; who at once pretend to entertain, and design to destroy their brethren; like *Jeab to Anasa*, with one hand they embrace, and with the other they stab.

How many young heirs have fallen a prey to this rooking generation of men? How many

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*A Disswasive from GAMING.* II

ny apprentices have ruined themselves, and robbed their masters, to feed those cruel and insatiable horse-leeches? Enough to make every discreet young men resolve, even in common prudence, never to expose one penny to such merciless thieves and robbers; nor ever to expend the comfortable patrimony of their fathers in a foolish way of prodigality, which beggars a man without the least gratification of any reasonable appetite.

And as for such as make account of getting their livelihood by gaming, as by a more easy, and as they call it, a more genteel way, than by an honest trade; they are usually deceived and ruined by this their idle project. For they are hereby brought to an idle and luxurious way of life; and have no honest way to support these great expences, and the losses which often befall them in their play. They are too lazy to work, and too proud to beg; and there seems but one way left that can speedily supply their wants, which is that of robbery, and this seldom fails to bring them to the gallows. Or if we view their case on the fairest side, and suppose, that among the thousands that are beggered by gaming, there may be one instance produced of an estate gotten by it; yet this volatile sort of gain will soon appear to be an unblest portion, and is seldom transmitted to the third generation.

And yet, notwithstanding all the sin and misery that has been brought upon men by these means, some people may perhaps reply, that they cannot be so disobliging to the company, as to stand out, when desired by others

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12 *A Disswasive from GAMING.*

to play with them, because it would look like a condemning them of sin or folly. But on such an occasion, any one may without the least breach of manners reply, that tho' we do not any ways censure those prudent persons who were persuaded of the lawfulness of these games, and can secure themselves against the inconveniences that attend them; yet if we think them unlawful or inexpedient, they will be so to us, whatever they be in themselves; yea, if we are in doubt about them. And it would be but ill manners in any one to press another to a thing, for which he has made so solid and discreet an apology.

In truth, our condition on earth is so frail, polluted, and exposed to the wrath of God, and we have before us such awful indications of it, that a serious, yea, a sorrowful spirit, does much more become us, and must needs be more safe and expedient for us than sport or pastime.

Upon the whole. Those wise and good people, who are not drawn to their diversions by any misbecoming motives, and can discreetly time the season and measure of them; who have a sure guard against the temptations and inconveniences which usually attend them; and do not find themselves unfit for better things when they have been at them: These persons will deserve to stand the fairest for a licence to game, but will be the last perhaps that will allow themselves in it.



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